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BEYOND THE SCROLL: HOW MARKETING TURNS ATTENTION INTO TRUST

Abstract

The article examines how consumer attention on social media can be transformed into brand trust, laying the groundwork for lasting customer relationships. Amid information overload and competition for users' attention, it explores marketing communication approaches that combine engaging content, practical value, and relevance to audience expectations. The article aims to explain how content and consistent consumer interaction contribute to brand trust and the transition from initial interest to a purchase decision.

Particular attention is paid to the content and communication factors that sustain audience interest after the first encounter with a brand's post. These include useful and credible messages, transparent offers, consistency between brand promises and customer experience, and timely responses to questions and feedback. The article discusses the role of social proof, including reviews, recommendations, and user-generated content, in reducing uncertainty when choosing products or services. It also

stresses the need to assess such materials critically and avoid manipulative communication practices.

The article further considers approaches to evaluating marketing communication effectiveness. It distinguishes reach and engagement metrics from indicators related to inquiries, conversions, repeat purchases, and customer retention. Views and reactions alone provide insufficient grounds for conclusions about trust or commercial outcomes. The practical value of the article lies in outlining principles for content creation and customer interaction that support stronger brand–consumer relationships. This approach connects the immediate goal of attracting attention with the longer-term objective of developing customer loyalty through credible communication and consistent delivery of value.

Keywords: digital marketing; social media; content marketing; consumer attention; brand trust; marketing communications; consumer behavior; social proof; customer loyalty; conversion.

Problem statement. In a digital communication environment characterized by abundant content and competition for consumer attention, attracting interest is an important challenge for brands. However, gaining visibility on social media does not necessarily establish trust or encourage a purchase. This raises the problem of understanding how initial attention can develop into confidence in a brand and support lasting customer relationships.

The problem involves the relationship between the ability of marketing content to attract attention and its capacity to communicate credible, relevant, and useful information. Brands need to consider how their messages, responses to consumer feedback, and delivery of promised value shape perceptions over time. An emphasis on immediate engagement may provide an incomplete understanding of communication effectiveness if views, reactions, and shares are assessed without considering subsequent customer behavior.

*Analysis of recent research and publications***.** Recent research examines social media marketing through the relationships between consumer engagement, trust, and brand outcomes. These studies provide a basis for understanding how attracting attention may contribute to stronger customer relationships, while also showing that engagement and trust should be treated as distinct concepts.

Ndhlovu and Maree (2024) investigate the relational drivers and outcomes of consumer–brand engagement in smartphone and social media brand contexts. Their survey-based study identifies positive relationships between brand trust, brand interactivity, and consumer–brand engagement. It also connects engagement with brand evangelism and consumer-based brand equity. These findings position trust as a potential driver of engagement, suggesting that the relationship between attention, interaction, and trust cannot be reduced to a simple one-way sequence.

Mizukoshi (2026) examines trust and perceived platform values among LINE and Facebook users in Japan. The study finds that trust in social media platform brands is positively associated with consumers' online brand-related activities. Remuneration and empowerment also contribute directly to these activities, although their hypothesized effects on trust are not supported. This distinction is relevant to the present article because incentives may encourage participation without necessarily strengthening trust. However, platform trust should not be equated automatically with trust in an advertised brand.

Spörl-Wang, Krause, and Henkel (2025) synthesize research on social media influencer marketing through a literature review and meta-analysis covering 93 papers. Their analysis distinguishes several dimensions of marketing effectiveness, including brand awareness, attitudes, engagement intentions, purchase intentions, and engagement actions. This differentiated approach supports the need to evaluate communication through multiple outcomes rather than treating visibility or engagement as a sufficient measure of success.

The importance of authenticity and transparency is addressed by Khalfallah and Keller (2025) in a systematic review of 51 articles on virtual influencer marketing. The review discusses how perceived authenticity, disclosure, and ethical concerns relate to consumer trust and engagement. Although its focus is specifically on virtual influencers, it offers relevant insights into the credibility challenges associated with digitally produced promotional content.

Taken together, these publications suggest that attracting attention, stimulating interaction, and establishing trust involve related but different processes. They also indicate that results depend on the communication context, the source of the message, and the type of trust being examined. On this basis, the present article focuses on integrating these perspectives into an explanation of how credible content and consistent brand interaction may support the transition from initial attention to lasting customer relationships. A relevant research task is to distinguish observable engagement from trust and to examine their connections with actual purchasing and retention outcomes.

Purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is to examine how social media marketing can connect initial consumer attention with the development of brand trust and lasting customer relationships. Particular emphasis is placed on the roles of credible content, transparent communication, and consistent consumer–brand interaction.

Presentation of the main research material and discussion of findings.

The present article adopts a conceptual approach based on the synthesis of selected publications on consumer–brand engagement, trust, and social media marketing effectiveness. Its findings consist of an analytical framework and propositions derived from the reviewed literature. They do not represent results from an original survey or experiment.

Understanding how marketing connects attention with trust requires a clear distinction between these concepts. Consumer attention refers to the allocation of

cognitive resources to a marketing message. On social media, a brand must first create an opportunity for its content to be noticed. However, exposure to a post does not necessarily mean that the user has paid meaningful attention to its message.

Engagement encompasses consumer involvement and responses within brand interactions. It can include psychological dimensions, such as interest and emotional connection, and behavioral manifestations, such as commenting, sharing, or creating brand-related content (3, p. 246). Trust concerns confidence in a brand's reliability and ability to fulfil its promises. Consequently, an observable response to content should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of trust.

Trust represents a separate relational construct. It concerns consumers' confidence that a brand will act reliably and fulfil its promises. Whereas engagement describes involvement in an interaction, trust concerns expectations about the brand's future performance. A consumer may participate actively in a discussion while remaining uncertain about product quality, service reliability, or the accuracy of promotional claims. Equally, an existing customer may trust a brand while rarely interacting with its social media content. Engagement and trust should therefore be assessed separately rather than treated as interchangeable indicators of relationship strength.

This distinction is consistent with the discussion by Ndhlovu and Maree, who position consumer–brand engagement as conceptually different from related constructs, including trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. Their findings also identify brand trust as a driver of engagement in the studied product and service contexts (3, p. 543). Thus, trust can provide a foundation for consumer involvement, while the possibility that engagement subsequently strengthens trust requires additional investigation.

An observable response to content should therefore not automatically be interpreted as evidence of trust. A comment may express dissatisfaction, a share may draw attention to a controversial claim, and participation in a promotional campaign may reflect an interest in the reward. These examples illustrate why the meaning of an

interaction matters alongside its frequency. For marketing evaluation, engagement metrics should be complemented by an analysis of response content and direct measures of consumer confidence in the brand. This approach makes it possible to distinguish attention and participation from the development of a trusting relationship.

The implication for the present article is that trust can function as an antecedent of engagement rather than emerge exclusively as its consequence. The relationship between attention, engagement, and trust should therefore be examined as potentially reciprocal and context-dependent, although the cited findings do not independently establish reciprocal causality.

Attention creates an opportunity for communication, but the substance of that communication determines what consumers can learn about a brand. Entertaining or visually appealing content may encourage an initial response. To support trust, the message must also provide information that consumers can assess against their needs and subsequent experience.

Credibility involves more than the appearance of professionalism. Relevant considerations include the accuracy of claims, clarity of product information, transparency of commercial intentions, and consistency between promotional messages and actual performance. A message may attract attention while providing little reliable information. Similarly, repeated communication may increase familiarity without establishing confidence in a brand's promises.

The accuracy of claims is a central consideration. Statements about product quality, benefits, price, or service conditions should be specific and supported by appropriate evidence. Broad promises, such as "guaranteed results" or "the best solution," provide limited grounds for evaluation unless their meaning and supporting criteria are explained. Credible communication should distinguish verifiable product characteristics from subjective promotional judgments and clarify relevant limitations. This allows consumers to form expectations that reflect what the brand can reasonably deliver.

Clarity of product information is equally relevant. Consumers need understandable explanations of an offer's features, intended uses, costs, and conditions. Important details should be accessible rather than obscured by technical language or ambiguous wording. For example, an advertised discount is easier to evaluate when the message clearly identifies the eligible products, the duration of the offer, and any additional charges. In this sense, clarity supports informed decision-making by reducing uncertainty about the proposition.

Transparency of commercial intentions concerns the consumer's ability to recognize the promotional purpose of a message and identify the interests behind it. In influencer marketing, this includes clear disclosure of sponsorships and commercial partnerships. Where virtual influencers or digitally generated promotional personalities are used, questions of authenticity and disclosure also become relevant. Khalfallah and Keller examine these issues in their review of virtual influencer marketing, highlighting their relationship with consumer trust and engagement (1, p.154). However, transparency should be treated as a condition for informed evaluation rather than a guarantee that every consumer will trust the message.

Consistency between promotional messages and actual performance connects communication credibility with customer experience. Advertising introduces expectations, while product use and service encounters provide opportunities to assess whether those expectations are fulfilled. A promise of rapid delivery, for instance, can be evaluated against the actual delivery time and the accuracy of updates provided to the customer. If performance repeatedly contradicts the message, the consumer has a reason to question subsequent claims.

Credibility should therefore be considered across the customer journey rather than assessed solely at the moment of exposure to content. Product descriptions, responses to questions, transaction conditions, and complaint handling all provide information about the reliability of the brand's communication. When an error occurs,

acknowledging it, correcting the information, and explaining the available remedy offer consumers further evidence on which to base their judgments.

Taken together, accuracy, clarity, transparency, and consistency constitute complementary principles for credible marketing communication. Their proposed contribution to trust rests on a common mechanism: they help consumers evaluate claims and compare promises with experience. This relationship remains a conceptual proposition in the present article; its strength and variation across audiences, platforms, and product categories require empirical investigation.

Khalfallah and Keller discuss authenticity, transparency, and ethical concerns in virtual influencer marketing. Their review indicates that digitally produced promotional content raises questions about how consumers interpret the source and credibility of a message (1, p.201). Although these findings concern virtual influencers specifically, they provide a basis for considering transparency when brands employ synthetic personalities or other digitally generated promotional materials.

The conceptual implication is that attention-generating techniques and credibility-building practices serve different functions. Their combination may support relationship development, but attention alone cannot compensate for misleading claims or an inconsistent customer experience. This proposition requires empirical testing before its magnitude or general applicability can be established.

Brand communication extends beyond the original publication. Responses to questions, handling of complaints, and clarification of offers provide further opportunities for consumers to assess the brand. These interactions may supply evidence of responsiveness and competence, particularly when consumers face uncertainty about a purchase.

Ndhlovu and Maree identify brand interactivity as a relevant driver of consumer–brand engagement (3, p. 654). Their discussion also characterizes firm-initiated brand interactivity in terms of two-way consumer–brand communication (3, p. 945). These findings support the inclusion of interaction in the present framework. Nevertheless,

frequent interaction should not be equated with effective interaction. A large number of responses may have limited relational value if they fail to address customer concerns.

Consistency is also relevant across communication and service encounters. If promotional content promises convenience, quality, or responsiveness, customer experience provides a basis for evaluating those promises. The framework therefore treats communication and operational performance as connected elements: marketing introduces expectations, while subsequent encounters allow consumers to assess whether those expectations are fulfilled.

Reviews, recommendations, and user-generated content can provide additional information about a product or service. Their potential contribution depends on whether consumers perceive them as credible, relevant, and sufficiently informative. The number of endorsements alone cannot establish their reliability.

Influencer communication illustrates why marketing outcomes require differentiated assessment. Spörl-Wang et al. distinguish several dimensions of influencer marketing effectiveness, including awareness, attitudes, engagement intentions, purchase intentions, and engagement actions (4,p.150). These distinctions indicate that a favorable outcome on one dimension should not be assumed to produce an equivalent outcome on another.

It is also necessary to identify the object of trust. Consumers may trust a platform, an influencer, a review author, or the advertised brand to different degrees. Mizukoshi finds a positive relationship between trust in social media platform brands and consumers' online brand-related activities among LINE and Facebook users in Japan (2, p. 157). This finding concerns platform trust and cannot be transferred directly to trust in every brand promoted through those platforms.

Mizukoshi's study also distinguishes participation from trust: remuneration and empowerment contribute directly to brand-related activities, while their hypothesized effects on trust are not supported (2, p. 234). This provides a reason to evaluate incentive-driven engagement separately from changes in consumer confidence.

The synthesis supports a framework comprising five connected elements: opportunities for attention, consumer evaluation of content, brand interaction, assessment of customer experience, and relational or behavioral outcomes. These elements describe possible connections rather than a fixed sequence followed by every consumer.

Attention makes evaluation possible. Credible and relevant information may help consumers assess an offer, while interaction can address unresolved questions. Customer experience subsequently provides evidence about the reliability of brand promises. Within the proposed framework, trust and engagement may reinforce each other, and outcomes may include purchase, recommendation, or continued use. However, these relationships require further empirical examination, and the outcomes also depend on factors such as price, availability, product suitability, and previous experience.

The framework's principal contribution is the integration of communication indicators with relational considerations. It avoids treating a purchase as a necessary consequence of engagement or assuming that every interaction increases trust.

The framework implies that measurement should distinguish communication exposure, engagement, trust, and commercial outcomes. Reach and impressions describe opportunities for exposure. Viewing duration, comments, shares, and other interactions provide information about particular forms of engagement. Trust requires direct assessment through appropriate research instruments addressing confidence, reliability, and promise fulfilment.

Conversion, repeat purchase, and retention provide behavioral information, but they are not direct substitutes for trust measures. A customer may purchase because of a discount or limited alternatives. Similarly, purchase intention should be distinguished from an observed transaction. This differentiation is consistent with the separate outcome constructs considered in the review of influencer marketing effectiveness (4, p.145).

Overall, the conceptual findings justify treating attention as an opportunity, engagement as a multidimensional response, and trust as a distinct relational construct. The proposed framework offers a basis for further empirical investigation and for developing marketing communication that connects visibility with credible information and consistent customer experience.

Conclusions. The analysis of the selected publications suggests that attracting consumer attention is an initial opportunity for brand communication, while building trust requires credible content, meaningful interaction, and consistency between brand promises and customer experience. Social media visibility and engagement therefore need to be considered alongside the quality of consumer–brand relationships.

For marketing practice, the discussion highlights the value of useful information, transparent promotional messages, timely responses to consumer feedback, and reliable delivery of promised benefits. Reviews, recommendations, and user-generated content may support consumer decision-making, provided that their credibility is assessed and their use avoids misleading audiences.

The evaluation of marketing effectiveness should combine reach and engagement indicators with measures of customer inquiries, conversions, repeat purchases, and retention. These measures capture different outcomes and should be interpreted in relation to campaign objectives. Where trust is a central objective, it also requires direct assessment rather than inference from engagement metrics alone.

Further research should examine how trust develops through repeated brand interactions and how this process varies across platforms, industries, and consumer groups. Longitudinal studies could help clarify whether particular content and communication practices contribute to sustained trust and subsequent purchasing behavior. Overall, the article provides a conceptual basis for connecting attention-oriented communication with the broader goal of building lasting customer relationships.

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